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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0030
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 8262
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 4505
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 4006
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 1172
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1882
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1861
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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KDEM ASEC KE

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CONDEMNS ATTACK ON PRESS
FREEDOMS IN KENYA

REF: A. NAIROBI 945

1B. NAIROBI 973

11. (U) The pre-dawn March 2 Kenyan police commando-style raids on the Standard Media Group's headquarters, television transmission station, and printing plant, which resulted in the destruction of property, arrests and the burning of newspapers, and the disruption of newsprint and broadcasting operations (ref A), prompted swift and sharp condemnation from the international community. (Ref B) Government statements on the raids are found paras. 2-3. International condemnation of the government's actions are found paras. 4-6.

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GOVERNMENT'S FEEBLE RESPONSE
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(Begin Texts:)

12. (U) Kenya Police Issue Statement

Statement about the raid on KTN and the Standard by the Kenya Police.
March 2, 2006

Following information gathered from various sources including intelligence sources, which threatens national unity and security, the police conducted an operation in the Standard Group premises to collect evidence of an intended act whose perpetuation would have posed a major threat to national security.

Evidence pointed to an intention of inciting ethnic hate and animosity leading to a breach of the peace. The Police have evidence of monetary inducement being used to perpetuate this activity which involves a series of fabricated articles aimed at achieving instability.

This activity is associated in an established bribe of 400,000/= that was paid to The Standard journalist as the first installment of this illegal campaign.

The decision to use masks by the Police is a standard procedure in sensitive operations where the identity of the specific officers has to be protected.

Similarly the police did not set any newspaper on fire and we are investigating who may have taken advantage of the ongoing police investigation and committed this crime.

Jasper N. Ombati
For: Commissioner of Police

13. (U) Minister for Information Issues Statement

Press Statement by the Minister for Information and Communications
March 2, 2006

This morning, I promised to issue a statement on the incident at Standard Group's offices.

As you are aware, the Police have issued a statement in which they have explained the sequence of events and circumstances which necessitated the action they took. I do not need to repeat what they said.

This Government is committed to the ideal of press freedom and promotion of responsible journalism.

The Government recognizes and respects internationally recognized standards, all of which have regard to the duties and responsibilities that go with freedom of press.

We pride ourselves in having a dynamic, vibrant and free print and electronic media which enjoy freedom as good as any in the world.

I am calling on the Media Council and the Media Owners Association, to quickly bring together their proposals on the media bill in order to expedite the tabling of the bill so as

to give legal teeth to self regulation, and create an environment where disputes between the media and the rest of the society are resolved amicably.

Hon. Mutahi Kagwe

MINISTER FOR INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATIONS

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Swift International Condemnation
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14. (U) US Deplores

The United States Condemns Attacks on the Media in Kenya
March 2, 2006

The United States condemns the assault early this morning on the Standard Media Group. These acts of thuggery have no place in an open democratic society. We note that these attacks were preceded by threats directed against the Standard from representatives of the Kenyan Government.

We deplore the current campaign of vilification and harassment of selected media. Clearly, the intent is to intimidate journalists, restrict press freedom, and deny Kenyan citizens their right to information and opinion.

We call upon the Government of Kenya to disavow today's actions, identify and discipline those responsible, and cease efforts to intimidate the media. The Government must respect internationally accepted rules of freedom of the press and charge or release promptly those members of the Standard Media Group currently in detention.

15. (U) Diplomatic Community Strongly Condemns

Statement by Heads of Mission in Nairobi on the raids of the KTN and Standard Group offices
March 2, 2006

The undersigned Heads of Mission based in Nairobi strongly condemn the raids on KTN's studios and the offices of the Standard Group, as well as the closing down of their operations. This action constitutes an unacceptable attack on the freedom of the press.

The Heads of Mission strongly urge the Government of Kenya to issue an immediate statement about the incident and state what actions the Government will take to investigate what eye-witness reports suggest were cases of assault, theft, unlawful destruction of property, kidnapping and harassment.

Last night's actions mark an unprecedented attack on the freedom of the media in Kenya and are in contradiction to the positive line taken by the Government on the issue of freedom of expression since the 2002 elections.

(signed)

European Union Missions in Nairobi (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Commission Delegation, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway, Romania, Switzerland and the United States of America

16. (U) UN Expresses Alarm

A Statement by Klaus Toepfer, United Nations Undersecretary-General and Director General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi In Response to the Raid on the Offices of the Standard Group
March 2, 2006

The United Nations wishes to express its alarm and concern over the raid on the headquarters of the Standard Group.

Earlier today editions of the Standard newspaper were burnt, the offices of the broadcaster KTN were vandalized and the station temporarily silenced.

Press freedom is central to a living democracy and has been often won through struggle and sacrifice throughout the world. Press freedom is central to human rights.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: &Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers8.

It is through publicly accountable bodies and through the legal system that grievances should be addressed including those linked with media and reporting.

We call upon the Kenyan government to clarify the circumstances surrounding today's events at the Standard Group.

We also call on the Kenyan government to take the appropriate action against those responsible, including legal action if necessary.

BELLAMY